Spirit of Post-War Paris

People Realize Tasks Ahead; Frivolous Only on the Surface

By PAUL BOWERMAN

The north wing of the Louvre and the Palace du Carrousel, the scene of many bloody fights in former days.

FOR the first time since the beginning of the war Paris has sufficiently recovered herself to create the illusion of other days. To those to whom this summer offered an introduction to the city, Paris fulfilled their expectations. Only those who have known Paris intimately in the past still shake their heads and say, "Not yet." And there is reason to believe that it will never be just the same, in more ways than one.

But to the average traveler, seeking in Paris the fulfillment of all he has hoped to find, there is little to be desired. It is again gay and care free and brilliant on the surface, and tremendously human at heart. Of course, there is always that small body of travelers to whom the Old World is a source of continual disappointment, to whom the Crillon pales into a third-rate hostelry in comparison with the Biltmore, and who are thrown into a fit of dejection if a *garçon* expresses ignorance of the ingredients of a Bronx cocktail. These are the ones who gather in the lobby of some fashionable hotel and hold indignation meetings, the outcome of which is a loud-voiced resolution to book passage on the next boat home.

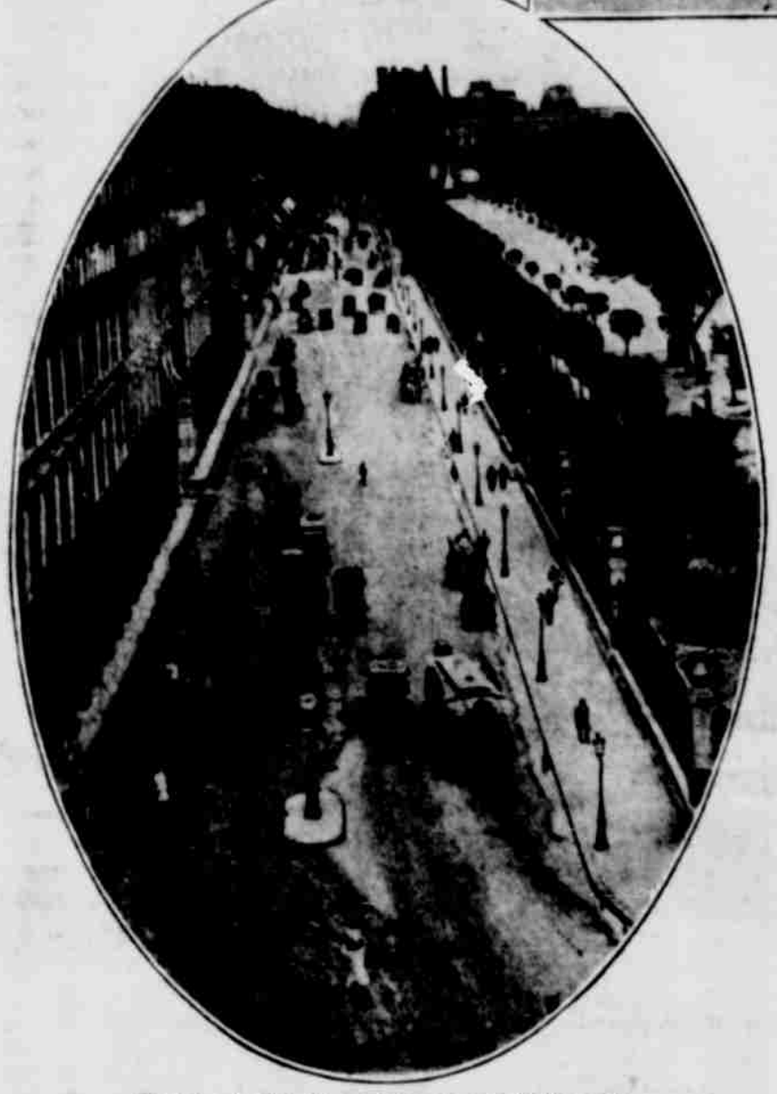
It is from such as these, quite incapable of judging anything save by their own standards, that the impression gains credence in America that France is going to the dogs and dragging all Europe with her. America, they say, has learned her lesson from the war and is now busily engaged in recovery. That is true, beyond doubt. But to continue the comparison and point an accusing finger at the frivolity of Paris as an indication of France's failure to recognize the seriousness of her task, shows an inability to understand the *esprit*, which is a fundamental of a Gallic race. Rather, it is sheer ignorance on their part.

However great may have been the psychological effect of America's participation in the war at a critical moment, the actual part she played was small as regards sacrifice of wealth and loss of man power. In New York there is little evidence of the war at present. In the streets of Paris there are thousands of women in black, and the men are very old or very young. And if a man of middle years passes by, one looks instinctively for a wooden leg or a leather arm or a scarred face. Women are driving taxicabs, running tramcars, and serving in restaurants, not as an example of the feminist movement, but because there are no men. France lacks sorely the most vital element of a country's population in her work of reconstruction. Sitting in a café on the boulevard, one forgets occasionally that the crowd of well-dressed fresh-looking young men who pass are tourists like oneself, come to Paris for an outing and seeking only to be amused.

That Paris can find the courage to laugh again, that the bourgeoisie can find heart to dance on the street corners during the festivals, that there can be anything left of the gaiety of other days, is the miracle of the *esprit gaulois*, which sustained France during the war and which ultimately will be so important during the hard years to come.

Paris is trying to forget the war, and it is very hard work. The gigantic disaster, despite the ultimate victory, looms up on every side. Only by the most rigid economy is the government enabled to meet its staggering liabilities, and the problems of taxation demand the utmost of ingenuity on the part of the experts, who are striving to reduce the burden on the people's shoulders. The fall of the franc has encouraged the exporting trade, but it has been offset by the increased cost of necessary imports. And the prices in France have advanced out of all proportion to increases in the wage level. With the present favorable rate of exchange, with 13 francs to the dollar, the American pays approximately the same as he did seven years ago with the franc at par.

For the average Parisian, to whom exchange rates mean nothing, the business of living is a problem. When a shop girl of the more intelligent sort receives



The Rue de Rivoli, containing many fashionable and expensive shops.

12 francs a day, from which she pays three for a room and a minimum of six for her meals, it is easy to believe that much of the berated night life of Paris has a basis more economic than moral. As is true everywhere, the most flagrant lapses from conventional morality are to be found among the very rich and the very poor—among the former because they have nothing to do, and the latter because they have nothing to do with. The root is always an economic one. The most emphasized and misunderstood charge against the girl of Paris is that she has the courage to laugh through it all.

In the first flush of the long delayed victory Paris did abandon herself to the pleasures so long denied her. She struggled frantically to discard the restrictions which she suffered under the military régime. Weary of sacrifice, nauseated with the ghastliness, and not then realizing the magnitude of the effort devolving on the future generations, Paris was charged with a feverish undercurrent, which has but lately given way to a sober and clear-minded acceptance of her burden. The world's history is an unbroken succession of contradicting reactions. The city in 1919 showed this clearly. To judge that the Paris of 1921 is still in the throes of a careless ebullition, because of the lingering remnants of this reaction, seems scarcely just. Yet the hue and cry is taken up in America to avoid the relapse which spread over Europe. Had America been as deeply involved in the war as the European countries, we should have suffered the same plight. Our good fortune is as potent a factor in our recovery as our virtue.

The almost unprecedented drought during the spring and early summer was a most discouraging setback to the work of reconstruction. Only by heroic effort and the coming of rain in late August was France delivered from a disaster such as has befallen Russia. The harvests will fall far short of even the most conservative estimates made last winter, and this will mean further advances in the cost of foodstuffs.

Like ancient Gaul, Paris is divided into three parts, each sharply contrasted against the others, and yet each partaking of a common atmosphere that links the three together in an indissoluble entity—the Paris-of-the-Tourists, the Paris-of-the-Students, and the Paris-of-the-Parisians.

The first of these is the best known and the least important of the three. It is the Paris of the great hotels, where French is seldom spoken and where even the elevator boys are accomplished linguists, the Paris of millionaire honeymooners, of dazzling cafés, of English tea rooms and American bars, of expensive shops where the superfluities of life are sold at prices that would sustain comfortably an appreciable proportion of the starving babies of Russia. The essence of this curious incongruity is centered in a triangle bounded roughly by the Avenue de l'Opéra, the Rue de Rivoli, and the Boulevards de la Madeleine and des Capucines. To this must be added the Boulevard des Italiens and that part of the Champs Elysées devoted to the summer music halls and café concerts.

It is not really Paris, but a gigantic absurdity foisted on travelers content to see the world through the smoke-bedimmed glasses of fatuous complacency. There is scarcely a Frenchman to be found there, save those who flourish by reason of the tourists' ignorance. Yet it satisfies the many who come to France with the express purpose of stopping at the Meurice or the Ritz. To spend a morning gasping at Paquin's manikins, to lunch at the Café de Paris, to visit the shops of Houbigant and Lalique before having tea at Rumpelmayer's, to prepare for a dinner at Armenonville by sipping a glass of vermouth at the Café de la Paix, and to hurry back to town in time for the last half of the Folies-Bergéres, is to go the rounds of the Paris-of-the-Tourists. It is magnificent in its glittering luxury and largess, it is bewildering in its variety of color and life, it is intriguing in its glimpses into the Gallic spirit, it is expensive beyond all previous calculations—but it is only a small part of Paris, and from the viewpoint of the Parisians themselves, an unimportant one.

It is an integral part of Paris because of the skill and artistry displayed by those who cater to the wants of the tourists. Nowhere else in the world are such restaurants to be found, veritable nooks of Paradise to delight the heart of the lover of choice wines and dishes. A score of names instantly present themselves to the mind where an unsatisfactory dinner is a practical impossibility—Marguery's, where the fried sole is the pride of the chef; Prunier's, where are to be found the best oysters in the world, and Laurent's, with its ices and sherbets. The list is endless.

The shops of Paris merit very nearly all the praise and fame they enjoy. And here again is evident the French genius for making beautiful and ornamental the simplest necessities of existence. The Rue de Rivoli, fronting the gardens of the Tuileries, is flanked by an unbroken succession of fashionable shops, the windows of which are crowded with the exquisite handiwork of clever minds and skillful fingers. But they are costly even with a favorable rate of exchange, quite apace with the prices of Fifth Avenue and Bond street.

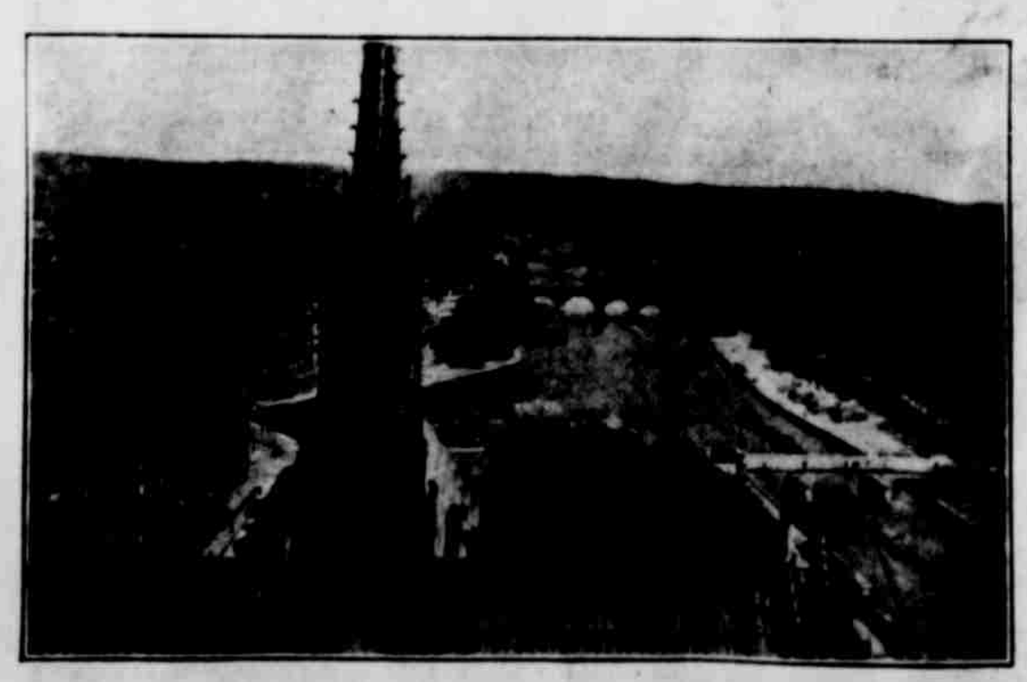
But when all is said and done, the Paris-of-the-Tourists is essentially a city of frolic. When the traveler is tired of shopping, and has penetrated the fastnesses of the Bois de Boulogne (where he fails to see the handsome equipages of the aristocracy), and has made the ascent of Eiffel Tower, and has walked around the outside of the Louvre, and considers he has seen enough to answer the questions of the ones at home, he is in a mood to see for himself the much-advertised wickedness of Paris. Without this, he feels his visit would be in great part in vain, and considers himself in duty bound to probe it to the depths.

The Folies-Bergéres and the Casino de Paris are the rallying points of travelers bent solemnly on the task of seeing to what lengths the French can go. Self-consciously they buy their tickets, and self-consciously they take their seats. If they look around they cannot fail to observe the preponderance of Anglo-Saxon countenances in the audience. Rows and rows of faces straining every nerve to catch the import of the quips and jests of the comedians on the stage, and translating to each other in subdued whispers the dialog between the clown and the dude.

With this in mind, one cannot but admire the profound knowledge of human nature evidenced by the gentlemen to whose care the program is intrusted. A more magnificent hoax was never inflicted on otherwise intelligent patrons. It is superb. It satisfies completely. It is a triumphant proof of the wisdom of giving the public what it wants. The jokes are just broad enough to obviate the necessity of understanding French, and the girls of the chorus are sufficiently undressed to satisfy the most demanding. The average American, coming to the theater with prejudiced ideas, goes away convinced that the French are very clever and very frank and quite immoral.

In the splendid absurdity of the Paris-of-the-Tourists, the absence of the French themselves should make clear the fact that it is not the real Paris, but a make-believe Paris constructed by brains far cleverer than the tourists who subscribe to it. To judge all Paris, and consequently all France, by this isolated incongruity is to see with superficial eyes and to fail to distinguish between the chaff and the wheat.

Across the river in the Latin Quarter and on the heights of Montmartre is to be found the Paris-of-the-



View of the Seine taken from the bell tower of Notre Dame.